

Chapter Twenty -- "Weddin' on Sunday".

One mornin', one mornin', one mornin' in spring,  
I heard a fair damsel so gallantly sing:

"I'm going to get married next Sunday morning,  
And I'll be fourteen on Sunday.

"With a bunch of blue ribbon tied round my waist,  
To dress me up neat against Sunday."

"A girl of fourteen is too young to marry;  
A girl of your age is too apt to get sorry.  
Seven more years I'd have you tarry.

Please put off your wedding on Sunday."

"Old man, old man, you talk with no skill.  
'Tis seven long years against my will.  
My mind is to marry; I intend to fulfill,  
And I wish tomorrow was Sunday.

"On Friday night to curl up my hair,  
And two little maidens to wait on me there,  
With a wreath of red roses pinned on my hair,  
To dress me up neat against Sunday.

"On Saturday night to bounce up and down,  
With a bunch of blue ribbon, my new-fashioned gown,

And invite all the ladies of Martinsburg town  
To be at my weddin' on Sunday."

It was my sister Shirley who taught me the song, when I was just a little bit of a shirt-tail boy. Shirley was the musician of the family most of the time that I was old enough to take much part in the singin'. An' it was Shirley who was to be married on Sunday.

Somehow, when the boys get married it doesn't come so close home to a family as when it's a girl -- especially the only girl. You go to the son's weddin', but when the daughter marries, the weddin' comes to you.

Not that we weren't in favor of marriage, or hadn't figured Shirley would get married some day. An' when Ernest's old school alumn, Owen Still, came to our town to preach, others saw the shadow of events, even if we didn't. It was Mrs. Ben Camp, Guy's "Aunt Fat", who was all of her name, an' wrote for the weekly paper at Carrollton, who first put it in words.

"Miss Shirley," she told her little girl's teacher. "We're so happy that we won't lose you when you an' the preacher get married, for you'll be Shirley Swetnam Still."

Shirley laughed an' said she hadn't any idea of marryin' him. An' for a while it looked as if she meant it. I think Walter an' I were a little disappointed, for the boys always want somethin' to be happenin'.

Marryin' is always a little more of a joke to the boys, too. We always loved to repeat the old rhyme the poet justice of the

peace used when he married the slaves back before the War:

Jim, will you take Bet  
Without any regret,  
To love an' to cherish  
Till both of you perish  
An' are laid under the sod,  
So help you God?

Bet, will you take Jim  
An' stick to him  
Both out an' in  
Through thick an' thin,  
Like a lean dog-tick to a Higger's shin?

Through life's alternate joy an' strife  
I now pronounce you man an' wife.  
Climb up life's hill till you get to the level  
An' salute your bride, you rusty black devil.

But though we might joke about marriage, we respected it.

Even if there were a few bastards born in the mountains, we never thought of people livin' together without bein' married, though later on we did learn that Great-Grandpa used to have a stud slave; that was mostly resorted to when they wanted to raise house servants with specially nice manners, Father said.

It was quite a shock to us when we moved to Tennessee an' heard that some of the families there "just took up",<sup>1)</sup> an' hadn't even jumped the broomstick, which was about the least ceremony any couple in the mountains ever thought was proper.

I still remember what Father told me when I asked him why people bothered to get married at all if what I later learned to call common law marriage was legal.

"It's legal," he said, "but it isn't nice."

Marryin' was the final wind-up of courtin', an' we had lots of songs about it, an' lots of stories. One of the songs was:

I'm goin' to get married, my Ma, my Ma.  
 I'm goin' to get married, but don't tell Pa.  
 I'm goin' to get married, but don't tell Pa,  
 For how can I help it, how can I, my Ma?

He gave me a ring, my Ma, my Ma.  
 He gave me a ring, but don't tell Pa.  
 He gave me a ring, but don't tell Pa,  
 For how could I help it, how could I, my Ma?

The carriage is comin', my Ma, my Ma.  
 The carriage is comin', but don't tell Pa.  
 The carriage is comin', but don't tell Pa,  
 For how can I help it, how can I, my Ma?

The preacher is in it, my Ma, my Ma.  
 The preacher is in it, but don't tell Pa.  
 The preacher is in it, but don't tell Pa,  
 For how can I help it, how can I, my Ma?

An' now we are married, my Ma, my Ma.  
 An' now we are married, an' you can tell Pa.  
 An' now we are married, an' you can tell Pa,  
 For how can he help it, how can he, my Ma?

There was an old game rhyme, too, about the girl that got married in such a big hurry that she got the wrong man:

Oh, law me; what have I done?  
 I've married the old man instead of his son.  
 He's bow-legged, but that's not half:  
 He's got a big head, like a yearlin' calf,  
 An' a hump on his back as big as a pan.  
 An' everybody's laughin' at my old man.

Marriage was still pretty much of a joke to Walter an' me, even after we found out Owen had proposed, an' Shirley had said no, which I suppose was still the proper procedure, a generation after Mother had used it.

Then one day Shirley went to some kind of a church meetin' with Owen an' some ladies, up at Carrollton. An' when it came time to come home, all the others had other rides, for maybe they had an idea what was up.

Anyway, when they started, Owen started, an' proposed for thirteen miles, an' lucky or not, she said yes.

That was in the winter, an' they were goin' to get married in May, after he got back from a meetin' he'd promised to hold in the mountains of Virginia in April. But just as we figured they would, they decided to get married the first Sunday in April, so Shirley could go along.

Walter an' Guy an' I an' some other young people gathered dogwood flowers an' wild honeysuckle, an' decorated the little church Owen had started, an' I guess it was the first time it had been decorated when Shirley didn't have a hand in it.

Everybody was invited, an' just about everybody came, an' after the weddin' ceremony there was a dinner that packed our house, an' then she an' Owen caught the train an' were gone.